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Constantine McGuire:

Man of Mystery



by Carroll Quigley

CONSTANTINE E. MCGUIRE, PH.D., FOUNDER OF THE SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE AND MAN OF MYSTERY, DIED IN NEW YORK ON 22 OCTOBER 1965, AT THE AGE OF 75.

Constantine McGuire was a man of mystery. Although he was a member of the American Historical Association for more than fifty years and was treasurer of that association for six years, at his death the available records showed little, beyond the date he had joined the association, and did not indicate even where he had been educated, nor in what university or field of study he had worked. The situation was no different at the American Catholic Historical

Association of which he had been president in 1933. Although he resided in Washington for 38 years, his closest associates did not know where he lived, but simply knew that he could be reached by writing to him at Box 1, the Cosmos Club. This was his address for 48 years and continued to be used until his death, although he had moved from Washington to Geneva, New York, at the end of 1952. In that town also he had no published address, but received communications at Post Office Box 447.

In some ways, the Cosmos Club was the center about which McGuire's public life revolved. For decades he could be found there, almost every day, in its lounge rooms, library, or dining room. Most of his acquaintances assumed that he lived at the club,

but an associate who saw him almost daily for years told me that McGuire had a house at Chevy Chase, cared for by an ancient housekeeper. This ministrator may have been a relative, for, when McGuire was himself already in his sixties, he told various people that he was the economic support of seven very old persons, of whom three were in ill health.

I wrote above that McGuire could be found at the Club "almost every day", but in fact he vanished from Washington for weeks or even months, every year, on business trips abroad, chiefly to Latin America. Many who knew him casually at the club were puzzled as to what he did, and tended to assume, from his obvious great learning, that he must be some kind of a professor. Indeed, as we shall see, that is what he planned to be and probably should have been, but, in fact, for more than forty-five years, his chief living came from his work as a private and very confidential consulting expert in international economic affairs, especially in matters of international finance and foreign commercial law. When still in his twenties, he drafted numerous treaties and other international agreements in commercial affairs for our State Department and was, for years, economic adviser and financial adviser to various foreign governments. It was rumored among McGuire's friends that he was one of the most influential Catholic laymen in the United States, had been adviser to the papacy on American financial matters, and, in the summer of 1929, just before the stock market crash, had advised the Vatican to transfer its security holdings here into gold in anticipation of a panic.

While we are concerned with rumors, it might be mentioned that a character in Somerset Maugham's novel, *The Razor's Edge* (a part played by Clifton Webb in the film version) was reputed to have been inspired by McGuire.

Whatever truth there may be in such rumors, it is a fact that at the age of thirty-two (in February, 1923), McGuire was made a Knight of St. Gregory the Great by Pope Pius XI, and included among his associates and friends many influential scholars and officials of the cosmopolitan world in which he lived. None of these, however, was allowed to have any overall view of his activities, so that it is no easy task today to give an adequate account of his life.

Constantine McGuire was born in Boston on 4 April 1890 and, like many ambitious Boston-Irish, penetrated the precincts of Yankeedom by attending the Boston Latin School and Harvard University. At both places, he was a contemporary of Joseph P. Kennedy. McGuire took three Harvard degrees: a bachelor's degree, *magna cum laude*, in political science in 1911, a master's degree in history the following year, and a doctorate, also in history, in 1915. His chief interest lay in the history of public law and institutions of the Middle Ages, so that much of his study was with Charles Homer Haskins and Roscoe Pound. With the latter he studied Roman law and comparative law. In 1913-1914 he went to Europe on a Harvard Travelling Fellowship, chiefly to Madrid and to Paris, where he studied law. He also attended classes or courses at Leiden, Bonn, and

Salamanca. In Paris he attended the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes and began to dream of seeing a similar institution in the United States.

On his return to Harvard in 1914, McGuire became an instructor in history and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history of immunities from royal jurisdiction. He took his Ph.D. in 1915 and looked forward to becoming a Harvard professor, but, in the course of that year, it was made clear to him that, as he expressed it, "Harvard had an unwritten rule which barred any Roman Catholic from teaching medieval history".

Bitterly disappointed at this blow, from which he never really recovered, McGuire left Harvard and gave up all aim of a teaching career. He took a position as research assistant in the office of the Secretary-General of the Inter-American High Commission in Washington, and within a few months, was made Assistant Secretary-General. At that time, the High Commission had much prestige, since its ten members consisted of John Bassett Moore, Samuel Untermyer, Paul M. Warburg, John H. Fahey, Duncan U. Fletcher, David F. Houston as chairman, Guillerom A. Sherwell, Leo S. Rowe, and ex-Mayor Andrew J. Peters of Boston. The Commission had twenty-nine national sections, made up of experts and civil servants of the different countries, each presided over by each nation's Minister of Finance. It was by these connections that McGuire established the contacts through which he later exercised his influence and made his living. Within a few years, in a manner which is unknown, he established those contacts with the Vatican which he later transferred, to some extent, to Father Walsh.

The High Commission worked to facilitate international economic relations between states, seeking to stabilize monetary exchanges, remove conflicts of laws, smooth all international transactions, and, if possible, unify or coordinate regulations on business organizations, including corporation laws and bankruptcy. In these efforts, McGuire worked closely with the State Department, drafting international agreements, and became the chief figure in these activities when Leo Rowe, the Secretary-General of the High Commission, became Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in 1917. It might be pointed out that Rowe in 1919 became Chief of the Latin American Division of the State Department for about a year and then, for twenty-six years, until his tragic death in an automobile mishap in 1946, was both Director-General of the Pan-American Union and, at McGuire's behest, Lecturer in Latin American History at the Foreign Service School.

McGuire left the High Commission in 1922 to join the staff of the Brookings Institution as an economist. He stayed there seven years during which he wrote numerous economic reports and collaborated with Harold G. Moulton on a large volume, *Germany's Capacity to Pay: A Study of the Reparations Problem* (McGraw-Hill, 1923). In 1923 McGuire edited a study of American Catholicism entitled *Catholic Builders of the Nation* (5 volumes, Continental Press, Boston, 1923). He made numerous trips abroad and in 1928-29, lectured in Berlin and Milan.

“... and those who are acquainted with Russian carried on, with Russian literature

In 1929 McGuire resigned from Brookings and devoted full time to his activities as a private economic consultant. He served for many years as economic adviser to Venezuela and engaged in a similar role with Argentina, Paraguay, Colombia, Nicaragua, and other countries, as well as for private concerns and individuals.

As we have mentioned, McGuire was treasurer of the American Historical Association in 1930-36 and was president of the American Catholic Historical Association in 1933. In World War II he acted as civilian adviser to many high military and naval officers, including Major-General George Strong, then head of U.S. Military Intelligence.

From his arrival in Washington in 1915 to his death, McGuire avoided all publicity and covered his activities with a cloak of secrecy which is almost impenetrable. He refused to appear in *Who's Who in America*, in the *American Catholic Who's Who*, rejected offers of honorary degrees and, it is believed, of foreign decorations. He did, however, accept, in addition to his Papal title, the Venezuelan Order of the Liberator and a nomination as a trustee of Notre Dame University. In 1922, when Father Walsh published a volume called *The History and Nature of International Relations*, which consisted of public lectures by ten outstanding authorities given in the auditorium of the Smithsonian Institution in 1920-1921 (a series instigated and arranged by McGuire), the book appeared with a dedication to McGuire. The latter wrote at once to the University, acknowledged the compliment, and expressed his regret that his name had appeared in public. Two years before, he had written to Father Walsh to insist that his name be removed from the School catalogue. At that time the catalogue also listed the names of an "Advisory Committee"; McGuire wrote to Father Walsh in the same letter, "I also recommend that the phantom 'committee' be notified of its existence and then discharged."

To the Georgetown community, McGuire's chief interest must rest in the very great role which he played in the founding of the School of Foreign Service in 1919, the founding of the Institute of World Polity in 1944, in Father Walsh's whole career, and, more remotely, in the establishment of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics in 1949. Much of this should be expressed in McGuire's own words.

In a letter dated 29 April 1953 to Father William F. Maloney, S.J., then Provincial of the Maryland Province, McGuire wrote, "The plan for the school was drawn up by me in 1916-1917 and discussed by me with Father Thomas I. Gasson, S.J. [then Dean of the Graduate School] and Father John B. Creedon, S.J. [then President of the University.] Father

Creedon could not see his way clear to take it on. I then tried to interest Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, of the Catholic University, who likewise felt it beyond his resources. At this stage, one day in the summer of 1918, I recounted the story to Father Richard H. Tierney, S.J., on one of his visits to Washington. . . . He took the school plan with him that afternoon to Georgetown. The next day he told me that Father Creedon would receive me the following Sunday so as to discuss it once more. It was then accepted in principle; and when the armistice came, the plan was given effect. Father Walsh had reported back from the Student Army Training Corps work and was assigned to take on this task. . . . Very few persons have any knowledge whatever that I had something to do with the origin of the school; in fact, few persons, in or out of the Society, are now living who know that I had. Probably Dr. J. de S. Coutinho is the only man at Georgetown University other than Father Walsh, who knows it. . . ."

For about three years, 1919-1922, McGuire acted unofficially as executive secretary of the school. He assumed the task of finding and hiring the faculty, obtained the first substantial financial contribution (\$20,000 from James A. Farrell, President of the U.S. Steel Corporation), and made constant suggestions, often about very minor matters, regarding the operation of the School. For example, he sent Father Walsh numerous "memoranda" in which he suggested, among other things, that monitors be appointed in each class to take attendance and exclude unauthorized persons, that the language classes were getting too large and should be divided into sections of no more than thirty students, that specific numbers of text books be ordered and that a designated number of these be placed on reserve in the library, that some courses were larger than had been anticipated and that, accordingly, assistants must be appointed to correct papers and that the salaries of the teachers concerned should also be increased. In addition, McGuire sent Father Walsh drafts of public speeches, including that given by the Regent in the Smithsonian on 14 January as one of the first series of public lectures mentioned above.

In finding a faculty, McGuire showed an unusual talent for discovering men of ability and scholarship who were then almost unknown but subsequently became famous. At that time McGuire was definitely "persona grata" with the Russian Ambassador. Through him in 1919, he discovered three recently arrived refugees: Michael I. Rostovtseff, Michael Karpovich, and Baron Korff. All three were unknown at that time in the United States, yet Rostovtseff, who became a professor at Yale in 1925, was regarded as the greatest scholar in ancient history working in the United States; Karpovich, who taught Russian history at Harvard from 1927 to 1957, is still remem-

life and the conditions under which it is and history, will find themselves in great demand."

bered with affection and respect by all who knew him; Baron Korff, unlike the other two, accepted a teaching position at the Foreign Service School and stayed there until his death. In a similar way, in 1919, McGuire sent Sherwell from the High Commission to be Professor of Spanish. At the same time, he hired a 26-year old State Department official, Dana Gardner Munro, to teach Latin American history. Munro was with the State Department until 1932, when he went to Princeton as a professor of history and became Director of Princeton's Wilson School of Public and International Affairs until 1958. When he was transferred to Chile in 1920, McGuire replaced him with his own former boss, Leo S. Rowe, who taught at the School until his death twenty-four years later. Others whom McGuire engaged in those early years were Ernest L. Bogart, W. F. Willoughby, James Brown Scott, John L. Latane, and Stephen P. Duggan, all of whom were outstanding authorities in their areas of competence.

Within two years (that is by 1921), McGuire was becoming disillusioned with the School, partly because he hated all pretense or any façade of publicity but chiefly because he had, despite his expertise, little grasp of the financial needs of such a school. Basically, he did not want any undergraduate study or any strictly vocational training, but wanted a high-level research institute concerned with the broadest principles and the fundamental realities of international affairs, to be used as a foundation for policy decision-making. What he had in mind was much more like Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs), or All Souls College at Oxford, or the American copy of All Souls, the Institute For Advanced Study in Princeton. The separation of McGuire from the School after 1923 rested on a difference with Father Walsh on priorities: McGuire felt that expensive projects could well begin before the necessary money was in hand (in the faith that God, or perhaps McGuire himself, would provide); Father Walsh, on the other hand, with a better grasp of household *economia*, if not of international economics, could not commit the University to expenditures before the money was available. Certainly he felt that no grandiose projects could be undertaken without endowment, and that, until such funds were provided, the School had to have undergraduate students to provide the tuition needed for survival. On this score the Regent's position seems to have been more realistic.

That McGuire's dreams were grandiose is evident from his letter of 1953, already quoted; he said there: "What I had had in mind was the intensive study of those factors which determined the course of foreign policy, combined with special auxiliary training in languages. I had myself attended the great Ecole Des Langues Orientales Vivantes of the French Government in Paris, before the war of 1914-1918, and I

knew that nowhere in the United States better than in Washington could that admirable establishment be used as a model. . . . The range of studies should be carefully focused on the policy-making and long-ranged aspects of international relations." Even in 1953 McGuire was still suggesting that the school be turned in that direction. The elementary, undergraduate instruction should be left to other institutions, especially to other Jesuit colleges, under Georgetown's guidance, with the advanced work provided at the School of Foreign Service. He wrote: "The coordination of training in the elementary courses might well have local variations to meet specific situations, but it would mean the bringing into line all the work throughout the country under authoritative and experienced guidance, and it would furnish a substantial number of men suited for foreign trade and related activities in their communities or elsewhere. The 'switch board' of all this would be in Washington at Georgetown. . . . In the field of research itself, at Washington, seminars with but limited numbers of men could turn out, in the course of a few years, an impressive volume of performance of high average quality; and *in less than one generation*, the Western Hemisphere's most authoritative center of the interpretation of the economico-social, psychological, and other factors which affect the conduct of international policy would be recognized as established at Georgetown."

As a result of McGuire's disillusionment with the development of the School of Foreign Services as an undergraduate institution, he became rather remote from it and from Father Walsh for almost twenty years, 1923-1943. But the Second World War reaffirmed his conviction of the need, in a Catholic context, of a research institute concerned with policy making. Accordingly, he persuaded Father Walsh, for whom he always had a deep personal respect, to establish, as an appendage of the School, an Institute of World Polity to consist of fifty highly qualified experts in various aspects of international affairs, with a small paid staff of research workers. The latter were to carry on research and prepare reports on such research (reports pointing toward policy decisions) under the guidance of the fifty experts. Such guidance was to be exercised by individual suggestions, by critiques for revision of the preliminary reports, and by joint dinner discussions of the problems involved. This plan and technique was very similar to that practiced by the English Round Table Group (which had been established by Lord Milner in 1910, was financed by Rhodes Trust and other moneys, and had founded the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1919), which played a very significant role in British foreign policy in 1910-1940.

The Institute of World Polity as planned by McGuire was established in 1944, with a Research Director named by him and a membership of fifty,

almost all chosen by him. The Director was Dr. Ernst H. Feilchenfeld, a recognized expert in McGuire's own area of international economic law and an extraordinary teacher. This Institute still functions under the direction of Professor William V. O'Brien. Typically, having set up the Institute, McGuire concerned himself very little with its functioning and, in most cases, did not even attend its plenary conferences. Equally typical was his remark in 1953. "I thought its name gratuitously pretentious."

To some extent McGuire's neglect of the Institute of World Polity, when he finally got it, resulted from his personal unhappiness at the condition of the world; he looked with growing horror at the rise of the authority of the state and the decline of religion, a combination which, he felt, could lead to nothing but disaster.

Despite his alienation from the Foreign Service School after 1923, McGuire's influence still continued to be exercised because of the extraordinary effect he had on Father Walsh's outlook and associations. It seems likely that the links between Father Walsh and the Vatican outside the regular channels both of the Society of Jesus and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy resulted from McGuire's influence. It probably was McGuire who suggested that Father Walsh lead the Papal Relief Mission to Russia in 1922, an event which opened the door to the Regent's subsequent missions to Mexico, the Near East, Germany and Japan. It is not, for example, generally known that Father Walsh, when occasion arose, had direct access to the Pope, and, by his private nocturnal conferences with Pius XI, roused the ire of the then Papal Secretary of State.

Moreover, it is quite certain that it was McGuire who first directed the Regent's attention to the importance of Russia. In 1920, fifteen months before the surprising appointment of Father Walsh to the Russian mission, McGuire was urging on him the supreme importance of establishing an integrated Institute or Department of Slavic studies at Georgetown. On 5 November 1920, he wrote to Father Walsh about this: "Five or ten years from now the demand for men who know Russian well will relatively far exceed the demand for men who know other languages; and those who are acquainted with Russian life and the conditions under which it is carried on, with Russian literature and history, will find themselves in very great demand. I think the time is ripe to organize a

distinct Slavic movement under the aegis of the Foreign Service School (incidentally promoting the best foreign policy of this government, demonstrating the foresight of the school authorities, and taking the wind out of the sails of any mere Pan-American Institution), which would aim to teach comprehensively the language, ethnography, economics, social conditions, history, and international position of Slavic peoples." He suggested that the program begin with a speech by the Russian ambassador and consist at the beginning of a course on the history of Russia given by Karpovich and a course on the economic conditions given by Baron Korff. Once this is started it should be followed by a course on Hungary and the Hungarian language given by Dr. McEachern of the Catholic University. The passage ended with a rhetorical question as to where the money for such projects is to come from. To this McGuire answered, "I will guarantee (as a sort of moral obligation, in the words of President Wilson rather than a legal obligation), that the money will be found for this Slavic division and for as many other 'ethnic' undertakings as you can set on foot."

It seems very likely that these urgings and the call to Russia in 1922, had a good deal to do with the direction of Father Walsh's interests for the next fifteen or more years, until he became interested in geopolitics at the end of the 1930's. In this way, and through his duties in managing the Foreign Service School, the Regent found his life drastically modified by Constantine McGuire, even in the lengthy period in which they met only infrequently.

Note: From McGuire's secrecy the task of compiling a biographical sketch such as this is very difficult and could hardly be achieved without assistance from other persons. For much of what appears above, I am indebted to the late Ernst Feilchenfeld. Most of the documentary support for this came from the Georgetown University archives, where I found Father Belwoar most helpful. Other information was provided by the Papal Legation, by Dr. Neusse of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, by J. R. Trainor, former secretary of the School, by Professor Sherbowitz-Wetzor, from the Cosmos Club, and from others. I wish to thank all of these for their assistance.

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